

## THE USEFULNESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS WHEN TEACHING ESP

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**Abstract:** *When used properly and in various contexts, social media platforms are unanimously considered essential and valuable teaching tools because younger generations are accustomed to them. They feel confident as they fit within their learned skill circle and are exposed to new trends, keeping them well-informed and motivated. This research paper explores the challenges of ESP teaching at the Civil and Mechanical, Industrial, and Maritime Faculties within Ovidius University of Constanța. It considers the benefits and drawbacks of how social media platforms can aid in addressing these challenges. There are numerous studies on the effectiveness of social media platforms, but just a few explicitly refer to their usefulness in ESP. A survey of 103 students and 6 teachers shows that social media platforms are an effective and enjoyable way to access educational resources. They improve memory and creativity, making them a good teaching method for today's learners. These platforms support self-directed learning and are appealing to a generation that likes engaging with video content. Utilizing social media in ESP education has become prevalent; however, there remains a great deal to understand regarding its effective application for teaching and learning.*

**Keywords:** *ESP; information and communication technology (ICT); social media platforms; teaching and learning*

### Introduction

In today's society, the employment of technology in language teaching is no longer a choice, but rather an efficient and highly productive alternative. That means concise research is needed to investigate how potentially useful technological gadgets or software may be incorporated into the English teaching and learning process. The rise and widespread adoption of social media platforms in the early twenty-first century, coupled with advancements in information and communication technology (ICT), prompted experts to explore and debate the effects of social media on various contexts. This is particularly true in the realm of education and language learning, given its significant role in facilitating communication among diverse cultures present on these platforms. Since the current generation is so familiar with the internet, spending most of their time either seeking information or talking to their friends, taking advantage of social media platforms would remarkably influence learning any language, including English. Social media is a broad topic that encompasses various forms, including social networking sites like

Facebook, LinkedIn, and X (formerly Twitter), content creation platforms like Wikipedia, video and photo sharing sites like YouTube, virtual environments like Second Life, and blog-style websites. Additionally, it encompasses virtual gaming environments, such as World of Warcraft (Aula 46; Kapoor et al. 49). These various social media services can be used in different ways to improve teaching and learning experiences. Creating learning groups on platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram would enhance the educational experience and significantly encourage language learners to apply their acquired skills by producing voice notes, comments, and practicing writing posts, as well as by actively engaging in conversations with people from around the world. If YouTube, on the one hand, may be employed to enhance their receptive skills, namely listening due to its limitless collection of videos, documentaries, or courses spoken in English, Instagram, on the other hand, may be used to expand their productive skills, by promoting picture discussions in which our students can use a language that occasionally supplies a lot of specific information.

However, no matter the pros, technology is not without its risks. According to Wannas and Hassan (30-43), several problems may occur when implementing technology in general, not just in language teaching. To avoid such challenges, educational institutions, universities in particular, must provide reliability, confidence, privacy, and identity protection, and prevent personal data leaking, which might deter students from continuing their studies and which might lead to dropping out of language classes altogether. To avoid our students' exposure to dangerous content or experience mental or psychological distress, when engaging with social media platforms in the language teaching/learning process, monitoring and assistance must be taken into consideration. Last but not least, another notable downside is the lack of specific educational procedures and strategies for teachers and students to employ social media networks efficiently (Dede 1-12; Bloch 429-447).

However, it is widely acknowledged that by incorporating the creative effects of social media platforms into language teaching, the value and efficiency of those lectures are extensively augmented. Baleghizadeh and Oladrostam (72-92) highlighted that integrating various types of language learning videos alongside traditional textbooks or workbooks will offer learners engaging and realistic simulated experiences through enjoyable activities. Meanwhile, the teaching process is polished and tailored to suit a certain individual or group. Nevertheless, internet-based teaching cannot entirely replace cooperative traditional teaching but rather supplement it.

### **Literature review**

Communication, business, and social life have all been significantly impacted by the Internet's ongoing development. The advent of social networks such as

MySpace, LinkedIn, and Facebook in the early 2000s resulted in unprecedented direct engagement. As social feeds, chats, and images became the dominant forms of online involvement, user behaviour changed drastically. YouTube and other video-sharing platforms made streaming entertainment accessible to the general public. This sparked the blooming of the influencer culture and citizen journalism, which documented current events in real-time throughout the globe. Differently stated, from Digital content streaming and videoconferencing to Artificial Intelligence, teachers can utilize the Internet to overcome time and geographical constraints or barriers, and attend numerous ESP professional courses at home and abroad.

Many English language instructors regard ESP teaching as a highly challenging and demanding task because they must comprehend the subject matter and associated instructional strategies or pedagogical content, as well as piece together their students' needs. Research on ESP education has revealed several serious concerns, including teachers' failure to apprehend students' fields of study, inadequate ESP training, deficient needs analysis, and large class sizes, all of which lead to inefficient ESP teaching and learning. Many ESP teachers strive to overcome challenges by devoting a significant amount of time and money to their teaching preparation and refining their expertise and abilities in teaching ESP in accordance with their profession. Information and communication technology (ICT) integration is a popular attempt among ESP educators to improve the efficacy of instruction.

According to Barnard and Zemach,

ESP should not be regarded as a discrete division of ELT, but simply an area (with blurred boundaries) whose courses are usually more focused in their aims and make use of a narrower range of topics. (Barnard and Zemach 308)

Differently stated, ESP assesses learners' needs as indispensable teaching means when choosing, adapting, and organizing the material and learning activities or tasks to satisfy students' needs and acquire communicative skills and competence for their future careers. Considering the literature on communicative competence (Greene 53; Weinert 113), we feel it makes sense, especially in educational contexts, to define communicative competence as the situation-specific employment of communicative skills.

Teaching ESP has never been a straightforward mission for a General English teacher because ESP teachers are no longer the authority on subject knowledge. He or she is more like a language consultant, accepting equal (or even lesser) status with learners who have their expertise in the subject matter. (Lou et al. 82)

For this precise reason and to bridge the gap between a lack of field expertise and teaching methods, many researchers have explored and suggested the integration of 21st-century technologies, including Virtual Reality, Gamification, Mobile-assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications, and social media platforms in the educational process to improve and enhance students' English language skills (Azar et al. 55–63). The rapid expansion of technology, along with the COVID-19 pandemic, has generated improvements and changes in the education field, particularly in the language teaching sector. The integration of information and communication technology (ICT) has become essential in the realm of language education. ICT is recognized for its numerous advantages, significantly enhancing the relevance, engagement, and motivation of students during ESP lessons. Moreover, Hussain considers that

Web 2.0 technologies have become a ubiquitous component of our daily lives, which is used by millions of people to communicate, collaborate, network and entertain through blogs, wikis, social media, YouTube, and games. (Hussain 149)

Web 2.0 tools are claimed to have significantly and drastically altered the pedagogical approaches, curriculum design, understanding of language acquisition, and even the research dynamics within various L2 learning environments (Wang, Vasquez 412-430). To put it another way, future English teachers ought to investigate and implement innovative teaching methodologies within the educational process, fostering motivation, participation, and engagement among students in their acquisition of English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Even if these tools have the potential to improve learner independence in language acquisition, Penner et al. consider that although the majority of present-day university students are highly computer literate and are familiar with online learning, only about a third of them are open to the idea of voluntarily using ICT for independent language practice. (Penner et al. 30) However, Lawrence strongly believes that ICT employment offers diverse opportunities for engaging with target languages and cultures, facilitating authentic negotiations of meaning within intercultural learning contexts. (Lawrence 305)

Arrosagaray et al. (31-40) insist on the fact that utilizing ICT provides students with increased personalized attention and facilitates deeper learning, while also promoting a spirit of exploration. Educators can predominantly employ ICT as repositories of content to enhance theoretical instruction, thereby limiting its potential to foster interaction through tutorial management, reflective learning, or student engagement. Researchers such as Prizel-Kania

(2777-2782) and Djiwandono (607-15) in their effort to tackle and explore the practical application of ICT have concluded that teachers have the opportunity to access a wide array of both written and oral texts that cater to varying levels of communication, ranging from interpersonal interactions, group dynamics, institutional frameworks to mass communication, which can be utilized as instructional materials within the classroom. Moreover, Nation (385) considers that “the use of social media is a fast-growing and rapidly changing opportunity for L2 language use,” which allows students to enhance their language proficiency by reading and engaging in discussions on diverse subjects. This perspective also encourages the establishment of a virtual community among students pursuing the same language. Additionally, it proves to be more convenient and economical compared to traditional communication methods, which is particularly advantageous for students residing in remote locations.

We consider that the inclusion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), more precisely of social media platforms, has the potential to enhance both learner satisfaction and the overall quality of education. It supports and promotes up-to-date and effective learning experiences that can lead to improved performance in English. If you know how to use the internet, social media websites can become quite helpful in teaching a foreign language. Here are some ways that they can boost language learning. By using social media platforms, learners can engage in real-time conversations with native speakers, which provides authentic language practice. Platforms like Facebook and X offer an opportunity for learners to engage in real-time conversations with native speakers. You can try Instagram and Pinterest for visual learning because they offer images, videos, which are great memory technique support for vocabulary and contextual understanding. Moreover, YouTube and TikTok provide a variety of video content, from tutorials to language lessons and cultural insights, that can enhance listening and comprehension skills. Social media enables collaborative learning through group projects and peer feedback and can foster motivation and engagement in learners, making language learning enjoyable. So, the various social media platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, X, Tik Tok, LinkedIn, Snapchat and others, play a crucial part in virtual learning by enabling the delivery of interactive multimedia, educational resources, lecture tasks, online discussions, instructional videos, and even interactive video conferences (Rabiman et al. 1059–1063; Hafifah et al. 186–98). The studies mentioned above have outlined the promising function of social media platforms as an educational tool for the future. Additionally, websites and blogs are recognized for improving students' language skills and proficiency. Furthermore, online communities, whether through social networking

platforms or dedicated websites, can offer valuable support to their members while promoting a sense of belonging within the educational setting.

### **Methodology**

In order to determine students' most preferred social media platforms and explore the possibilities of these collaborative learning tools, this study employed a quantitative and qualitative methodology to examine the challenges associated with ESP instruction within the Civil and Mechanical Engineering Departments at Ovidius University of Constanta, Romania. 103 students and 6 academic staff members, including English language instructors and faculty teachers from the Civil and Mechanical engineering departments, participated in this survey during the 2023-2024 academic year. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: questions 1-6 collected comprehensive demographic data on the participants, whereas questions 7-16 assessed the most important social media platforms, meant to explore all English language skills and specific tasks and exercises related to each skill. The overall focus of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness and impact that social media has on the learning environment. Thus, our main scope in this study is to better understand how students and faculty regard teaching and learning aided by social media, by gathering feedback from them on this issue. The study also inquires about possible challenges faced when using these platforms for educational purposes.

### **Findings and discussions**

During the pandemic, teachers were urged to investigate and implement innovative pedagogical approaches within the teaching-learning process, which had a decisive impact on boosting student motivation, participation, and engagement in acquiring English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Social media platforms can have a considerable impact on overcoming the challenges associated with teaching ESP. It offers educators a wide array of resources that encompass authentic, genuine examples of communication appropriate for Civil and Mechanical Engineering. Social networking tools such as social websites (Facebook and LinkedIn), micro-blogging platforms (X or formerly Twitter and Reddit), Instant Messengers (WhatsApp, Skype, Telegram, Zoom, Google meet), social media/news websites or apps (BBC news, Flipboard), video-sharing platforms (YouTube, Instagram and Flickr), and Wikis (Wikipedia, online dictionaries) are abundant with genuine communication samples that enhance the learning experience, granting ESP teachers access to various teaching materials. The social networking tools mentioned above, among others, offer language learners the chance to improve their digital and

multiliteracy skills. They facilitate interaction in the target language, promote collaborative work, and contribute to the enhancement of both linguistic and pragmatic proficiency. The results of our investigation confirmed that Facebook is a flexible tool for education across different countries and fields. Among 15 analyzed social media platforms, Facebook, X, and YouTube received the most attention. This shows a growing interest in using Facebook for educational purposes. Educators offered two reasons for this trend: first, as social media usage increases, more academic studies look at its educational uses; second, more advanced platforms are more likely to be used for teaching. Social networking platforms like Facebook, X, and Instagram are widely used for sharing information, learning, and building connections among students. A recent study found that students mainly use Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, and WhatsApp for creating content and discussing learning (Manca 1–13; Cao et al. 581–593). Research shows that Facebook groups can enhance learning more effectively than traditional online systems (Barrot 863–875; Chugh, Ruhi 605–616; Hew 662–676; Niu 1384–1406). Additionally, X has been noted for its ability to support collaboration and content creation among students. Recent studies are also looking at how platforms like Pinterest, Instagram, and Snapchat can be used in education (Manca 1–13).

One approach to tackle the challenge of multimodality in educational settings is the incorporation of YouTube videos within the classroom. Blending these visual and auditory resources enables students to engage with content in diverse ways—both by observing and by listening. This multifaceted approach enriches the overall learning experience for students. This aligns with the research conducted by Alhaj et al. (302-17), which highlights the benefits of online videos in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Resources of this type can be very useful in facilitating the understanding of technical vocabulary by transmitting specialized knowledge and in improving advanced listening competencies. Platforms and social networks, in their diversity, have an important role in building up productive skills in ESP as they promote interaction among students and among students and educators and thus act as educational tools while also taking place outside the traditional school environment.

Additionally, these platforms can greatly enrich learners' ESP vocabulary. Moreover, social media offers various supportive features that foster learners' confidence and language proficiency, reduce anxiety, and promote greater learning autonomy. The ESP students typically perceive social media in a favorable light for educational purposes, whereas the 6 educators participating in the questionnaire are more wary because they tend to favor utilizing social media for research and professional development rather than primarily for instruction and educational activities.

However, the results of the questionnaire can be grouped into three main areas: first, perceptions of social media as an educational resource, focusing on students' and instructors' attitudes towards its use; second, social media as a tool for supporting collaborative learning, student engagement, and better communication; third, the effectiveness of social media in teaching and learning, highlighting its role in community building and informal education. The following graph illustrates the most preferred social media platforms among students and teachers based on the results processed by the author.

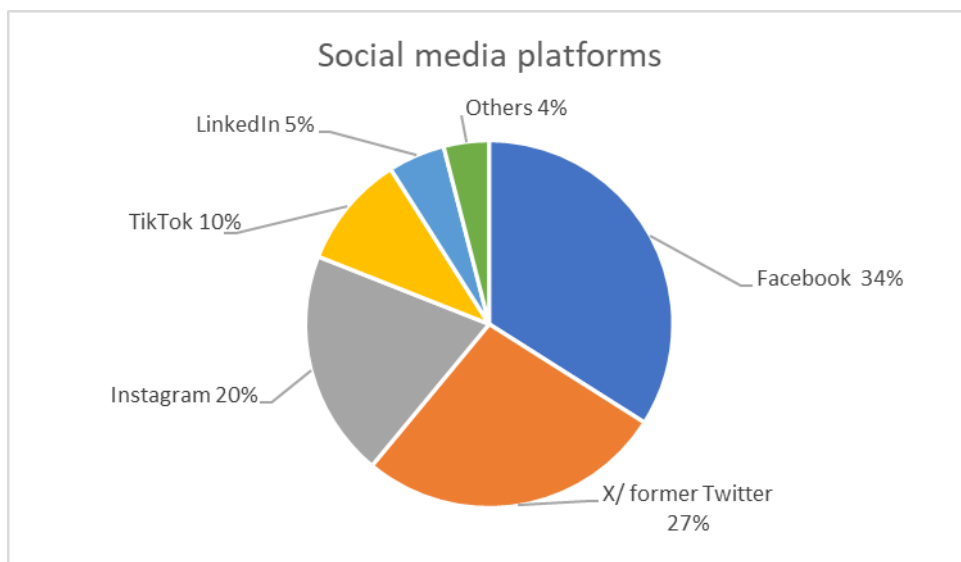


Figure 1. The most preferred social media platforms (source: survey answers processed by the author)

According to the graph above, 34% of the respondents opted for Facebook, 27% for X/ formerly Twitter, 20% preferred Instagram, 10% selected TikTok, 5% chose LinkedIn, and 4% others. More studies are expected to be conducted as new social media apps grow in number and usage. Statista (2024) noted that TikTok has grown the fastest among all social media platforms since its launch in 2017, reaching approximately 83 million monthly active users by February 2021. TikTok has also been shown to be a useful educational tool for promoting civic engagement and political involvement. As Facebook and other social networking sites are increasingly prevalent in everyday life and are becoming integral to education, educators must explore the most effective ways to utilize these tools for teaching and learning (Madge et al. 141–55).

When it comes to their roles in supporting active collaborative education, engagement of students, effective communication, and enhancing group results, all the respondents acknowledged the capability to create a community of practice and enhance learning potential. Additional comments



admit that it's important for students to engage with each other and participate in discussions. Effective communication among group members leads to better understanding and teamwork. This collaboration helps improve the overall results of the group's work and learning experience. Social media has become a great tool for collaboration in teaching and learning. It helps students work together on projects, share ideas, and provide feedback. According to our ESP students, platforms like Facebook, X, and Instagram can be used to share knowledge, discuss ideas, and collaborate on assignments, regardless of where the students are located. One main advantage of using social media for collaboration is that it promotes active learning. When students work together, they engage more with the material and improve essential skills like communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking that are useful both in school and in life. Students see LinkedIn as a valuable tool for connecting with experts and mentors in their fields. The platform helps them build relationships and networks that could help in their careers. They can follow industry leaders, join online discussions, and connect with colleagues and mentors for support and guidance. These results align with Dijkmans et al. (58-67), who define the term "engagement" as a combination of cognitive components (e. g. showing interest), behavioral components (e. g. taking part), and/or emotional components (e. g. experiencing positivity). Therefore, both the educator and learners ought to participate in learning through social media – comment, provide feedback, engage in discussions, pose questions, or otherwise participate.

When asked about the efficiency of social media platforms as a tool for facilitating the sharing of knowledge, information, and conversation, the majority of the participants (78%) recognized their role in facilitating communication and connecting people. Nevertheless, the teachers involved in this study question how effectively these platforms truly foster significant interactions. Moreover, educators highlight the challenges and limitations of using social media in education. They mention problems like too much information, the need for accurate information, and privacy concerns.

Social media platforms and gamification have significantly impacted the lifestyles of children, adolescents, and adults globally. Researchers such as Roslina & Azizah (293–298) and Rafail Prodani et al. (1453-1460) suggest that incorporating online gamification in education may not only enhance motivation but also improve students' concentration on learning and their advanced cognitive skills. Approximately 51% of respondents reported having utilized both social media platforms and gamification in the context of language teaching and learning. Gamification uses game design elements such as points, badges, and leaderboards to make learning more enjoyable and engaging. Social media platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram offer multiple gamification features that can be employed to develop a more

interactive and engaging learning experience. Several suggestions and proposals were presented by both students and educators. The blending of game-based learning platforms such as Duolingo or Kahoot! into the foreign language teaching curriculum should be given precedence, given their adaptability to different competency levels and their proven effectiveness in promoting language acquisition among learners. Moreover, adopting a game-based learning strategy where learners respond to questions competitively turns the learning process into a more enjoyable, interactive, and engaging experience.

The findings also revealed that 72% of the participants were convinced that Facebook provided users with more task control and a user-friendly interface. Additionally, 45% of the respondents found X/ formerly Twitter to be significantly more convenient, desirable, and suitable in completing their tasks. Consequently, the teachers interviewed recommended incorporating social media platforms as a teaching strategy, as they offer students a variety of activities to engage with irrespective of time and location, while also motivating interaction among peers and instructors in the target language. Social media has greatly improved access to educational resources, making it easier for learners to find content and connect with instructors and peers. Instructors can share links to useful materials like articles and videos on platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram, allowing learners to access relevant content anytime and anywhere. Social media also enhances communication, enabling learners to ask questions, share ideas, and give feedback, which fosters engagement and collaboration. Furthermore, many educational organizations offer online courses and webinars on these platforms, making learning more accessible.

Multiple significant recommendations have been put forward, indicating that ESP teachers ought to integrate social media platforms into their instructional strategies to stimulate learners' interest and promote effective ESP learning outcomes. Nevertheless, it is crucial that they remain aware of the potential downsides of social media platforms and their impact on learners. By developing tailored platforms and mobile applications that include professionals within the same industry, newly hired individuals can leverage the expertise and language proficiency of their more experienced peers. Such platforms can prove to be invaluable resources for individuals seeking to enter a particular profession, aiding in knowledge acquisition, familiarization with industry-specific language, and connecting with like-minded professionals.

The respondents gave rather mixed opinions regarding the concerns about diversion/time management, information overload, privacy/safety and access to technology and these are illustrated in the graph below (Figure 1).

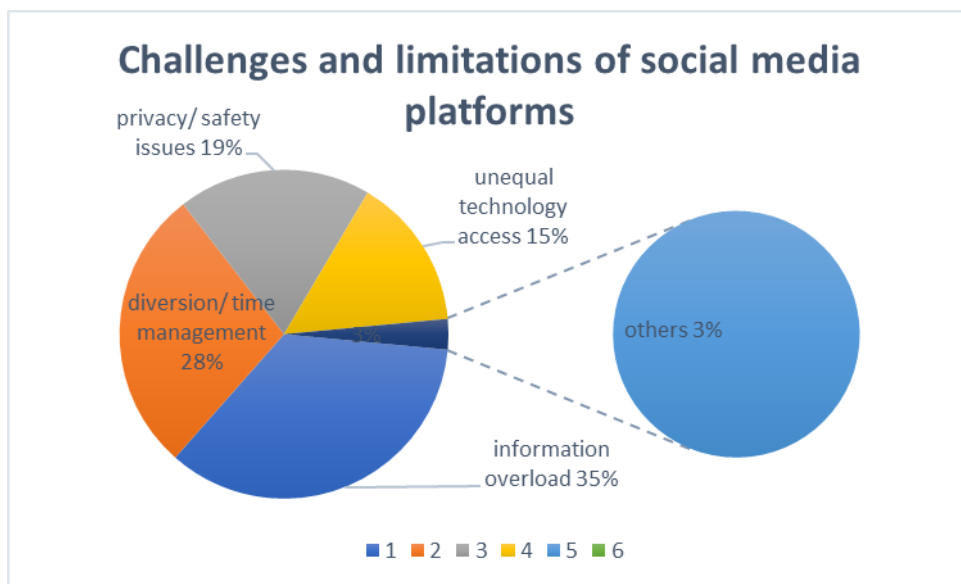


Figure 2. Challenges and limitations of social media platforms (source: survey answers processed by the author)

35% of survey respondents noted that social media can be influenced by fake news and misinformation. This can mislead students and negatively impact their education. Therefore, teachers should help students assess the reliability and accuracy of information found on social media. Therefore, we encourage learners to develop their critical thinking skills to evaluate sources and distinguish between reliable and unreliable information, and teachers to give clear instructions about what types of sources are acceptable for research and academic work. 28% of the participants thought that improper use of social media can distract learners. It can block focus, reduce attention span, and impact learning negatively. To address this issue, teachers must provide clear guidelines on the appropriate use of social media within the educational framework. Learners ought to be encouraged to use social media exclusively for scholarly purposes and avoid its use during lectures. Instructors should additionally incorporate time management strategies into their teaching methods to help students use their time effectively. Social media is changing how education is delivered. Students should learn to assess their time spent on social media and recognize what truly matters in their lives. They need to see how much of online life relates to real life. Despite concerns, teachers believe social media can be helpful in education. 19% think that privacy and security concerns constitute another significant challenge of social media in the educational process. As the usage of social media increases, students may inadvertently reveal personal information that could be accessed by unauthorized persons. Additionally,

students could also become victims of cyberbullying, harassment, and online risks. Students should be encouraged to use privacy settings and avoid sharing personal information on social media. 15% of those participating in this study consider that students from economically challenged backgrounds may not possess the necessary technology and devices essential for accessing these platforms. This circumstance can create a digital divide and limit the educational prospects for certain students. To tackle this issue, educators must guarantee that every learner has the same access to technology and equipment.

## **Conclusion**

This paper encourages teachers to acknowledge the benefits of social media platforms, stay informed about current technological developments, enhance their skills to teach tech-savvy students effectively, and, most crucially, integrate technology into their teaching practices. Such approaches aim to elevate student achievements and prepare them to navigate the expanding realm of multimedia technology and the era of digital literacy.

The findings of this study confirmed that social media platforms have greatly impacted the teaching and learning process. They provide many chances for students to engage with educational content, collaborate with classmates and experts, and access various learning resources. As they encompass features like multimedia content, feedback, gamification, and tools for collaboration, teachers can use them to enhance engagement, improve education quality, and boost learning outcomes. Social media platforms make it easier for learners to find content, interact with teachers and classmates, and connect with professionals. However, we should also acknowledge their challenges, including privacy and security concerns, too much information, and distractions. Understanding how teachers and students feel about social media can help create better learning environments. It can also highlight any challenges that might come with using social media, allowing for ways to avoid these issues. This article can guide future researchers interested in implementing the use of social media in education.

Nevertheless, researchers are urged to thoroughly explore this area, as it remains insufficiently researched and requires comprehensive investigation, encompassing all relevant skills and language functions. The development of corpora can facilitate the production of authentic materials pertinent to the domain of English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

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